New Fiction

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the effect of a *deus ex machina* in his recurrent appearances, functioning a little mechanically.

The subsidiary pair of lovers and the minor characters are very well done. In the handling of the individual character, as Mr. Milne points out in his preface, the dramatist has an advantage when he turns to novel building. "One of the first things," says he, "which the dramatist discovers is that he must know all about anybody who steps into his play before he can show the least little angle of the character correctly to the audience. He must be assured of his Othello's color all over, even if he be exhibiting no more than the face and hands. It follows that with every play . . . the dramatist has within him full material for a novel."

But that doesn't follow at all! He may have—must have—a fully understood, adequately conceived collection of individuals; an adequate cast of characters for a novel, indeed, but there is, or should be, more to the makeup of a novel than that. More, too, than a good dramatic situation, if it is to be anything but a "novelized" play. Its perspective, its background, its whole composition are radically different to the necessarily narrow selectiveness of a play. Possibly that is one reason why so much of our current fiction is so thin; much of it is merely attenuated stage stuff.

CHANTING WHEELS. By Hubbard Hutchinson. G. P. Putnam's Sons.

IT is difficult to be quite fair to this book. It means so well and has so much that is attractive and really good about it that one does not like to be obliged to record that as a whole it does not succeed. It is an affair of impossibilities, of impossible contrasts and unrealities, but there is, now and then, a bit of poetic glamour in it, and the underlying idea is worth while. But the central figure, Dante Gabriel Raleigh, is as unlikely as his name. He is a compound of pure music and solid beef; of artistic fineness and practical, utilitarian business sense. Not inconceivable, possibly, but pretty hard to swallow. His background also is a mixture of violent, raw realism and rainbow vagaries. The elements do not mix, and instead of complementing they kill each other.

Moreover, the language attributed to him and to other characters is fantastically stilted—absurd to the point of caricature at its worst. Raleigh, who is a highly equipped musician, goes to work in a foundry and mixes in with the men, Slavic and other "extraneous" races, and gets on marvelously with them because of his music, and in spite of the fact that he talks a language that would be quite unintelligible to them. The sociology of the whole thing is strained, queerly, though there are very effective bits of realistic description. The spirit of the great machines gets into the musician's blood and he produces a marvelous "chantey" that gives full expression to the rhythms and harmonies of the wheels. One may grant that as an achievement and still fail to see in it a possible cure—even symbolically—for labor troubles.

When a strike is threatened the musician manages to have the men sing themselves out of it, turning their emotional expression into melody instead of sabotage. The incident characterizes the whole book. One feels that the author is an idealist rather gone astray into a field that does not really welcome him. But he has true descriptive power, above the average, and is obviously entirely sincere. If, as we infer, it is a first book Mr. Hutchinson may find himself and produce something very well worth while, for there is at least, nothing commonplace about either his manner or the subject matter of his thought.

JANE JOURNEYS ON. By Ruth Comfort Mitchell. Appleton.

THIS is another case of the sprightly, highly intelligent, ambitious village maiden who breaks away from her early environment and humdrum life to work miracles in the city. This one, Jane, is of the writing variety. Instead of marrying the obvious young man of her Vermont village she escapes to New York in pursuit of a career. The miracles come off promptly; No. 1 being her instant success with a one act play. Not that dashing it off at once is at all unusual; the wonder of it lies in its instant acceptance. After that, of course, all else is easy. Her literary career sends her careering over a good deal of the map, from Maine to Mexico, with Chicago as a way station.

The other thread of the story is largely "uplift," and a general gladdening of the spirits of all with whom she comes into contact, including a sentimental young Irishman. It plunges into settlement work and general and specialized uplift. The incidents are well engineered and the book is not lacking in humor, of which there is enough to tone down the generally sentimentalized atmosphere. It is a soundly conventional, pleasantly told romance, with occasional indulgences in more lurid melodrama as, for instance, in the description of a fire in a subway car—a situation strenuous enough to bring Jane and the Irishman to an understanding of each other's love. It all moves, as magazine serial fiction must nowadays.

IN THE MORNING OF TIME. By Charles G. D. Roberts. Frederick A. Stokes Company.

IT is clear that, in the phrase of our intelligent friend Hermione, prehistory is "coming in." And—isn't prehistory simply wonderful! No doubt much of the extending interest in it is traceable to the brilliantly entertaining early chapters of Wells's "Outline," ably seconded by Mr. Van Loon's picturesque account of our earliest days. Doubtless, too, the sober scientists, from Henry Fairfield Osborn down to the humble school book maker have done much to arouse a really widespread, popular curiosity as to the days of the dinosaur and the later era of Mr. Eoanthropus Dawson of Piltdown. Now comes the facile Major Roberts with an offering of pure romance from the morning of human time. It is almost a generation since the "Story of Ab" attracted a large public attention, and both scientists and romancers have learned a good deal since then.

Major Roberts, it has been truthfully said, "does not imagine his facts," though he does handle them in highly imaginative manner. That is legitimate. One may even quote John Burroughs, who said, speaking of Roberts, that "the imagination may be used in interpreting and narrating facts—must be used if literary value is to be the outcome." The question becomes where to draw the line; it must at least stop short of "nature faking," or even of such distortion of facts as to produce an untruthful picture. On the whole, in this book, Major Roberts manages to keep pretty well within bounds, though, of course, the anthropologists will fall foul of him for exaggeration and misinterpretation. As to that, they quarrel merrily among themselves. The science of prehistory is still very much in the making. And whether the hard shell scientists think he has slopped over or not, Major Roberts has built an engrossingly entertaining story and one that has genuine educational value, even if that be limited to arousing the reader's curious interest and spurring him to further study and thought.

The traditionally carping critic will object to placing man and the dinosaurs in the same era, but it is a very, very early man, and almost the last of the dinosaurs. And it was not a very big dinosaur—only twenty feet long, or so, not counting the useful tail, and but eight feet tall. Moreover, only the other day came the news report of a possibly existing plesiosaurus in the Patagonia of our own time. Maybe he emerged into the news columns just to give plausibility to the second chapter of this book—a bit of prehistoric press agenting. Anyhow he serves to justify Major Roberts.

No one can take exception to the ensuing battle of the monsters, which is sufficiently blood curdling. The book is chock full of first class thrills, ending in a fine wholesale slaughter. As to paleontological detail, description of his beasts and of the aspects of nature Major Roberts is careful and is basing all his narrative upon as sound a foundation of facts as can be laid for such a structure. If one does not always follow him so confidently in his prehistorical human psychology it really doesn't matter, for we certainly cannot say that he is wrong in his interpretation. And it all makes an extremely good story.

The opening sentences tempt to quotation:

"It lay apparently afloat on the sluggish, faintly discolored tide—a placid, horse faced, shovel nosed head, with bumpy holes for ears and immense round eyes of a somewhat anxious mildness. The anxiety in the great eyes was not without reason, for their owner had just arrived in the tepid and teeming waters of this estuary, and the creatures which he had already seen about him were both unknown and menacing."

That is imaginative description of a high order; a picture that stays with you. The book is full of such good things, enough in themselves to make it worth while.

HIS DOG. By Albert Payson Terhune. E. P. Dutton & Co.

MR. TERHUNE has done two excellent things in this his latest dog story. He has once more given us a thoroughly doggy dog—this time without a trace of exaggeration or humanized psychology—and he has also produced a human character sketch that is more warmly and accurately human than anything in his more pretentious longer novels. Link Ferris, the young farmer who has grown up, lonesome and abandoned, in the hard environment of a sour soiled, rough, stony farm in a secluded corner of northern New Jersey, is a striking figure, quite out of the run of stock characters in current fiction. He is a breathing reality. The dismal, utter isolation of such a life may be hard to realize, but it is an actuality, even to-day, within a very few miles of Tuxedo to the north and the emphatically urban Paterson to the south. One can get further away from a railroad in that "neck of the woods" than in any other section short of the Adirondacks.

Link literally hadn't a friend in the world, and no relief from the bitter monotony of such a life except an occasional drunken spree, until he happens upon a collie with a broken leg lying in the roadside ditch. His first impulse is to put the animal out of its misery, but he hasn't quite the heart to do it and rescues him instead. Thereafter, for the first time in his life, Link has a friend. The dog makes a man of him. "He drug me up to my feet," says Link, "out'n wuthlessness, and he's learned me that livin' is wuth while." What if the process is just a little sentimentalized in the telling? Such a lonely man would be sentimental. There is no unreality, no exaggeration in the course of Link's growth under the impulse of love and—yes—respect for his dog. "The more I know of men," said a caustic French critic, "the more I esteem dogs." The remark is capable of other than satiric application.

The dog, Chum, is a fine gentleman, but he remains entirely canine. The presentation of animals in fiction is always a hazardous business. It is so easy, so natural to equip them with thoughts and feelings and reasoning powers that are not demonstrably or even conceivably animal. Mr. Terhune himself has not always escaped that pitfall, but he does keep wholly clear of it here. Any one who has ever enjoyed the friendship of a real dog will accept Chum at once—and other people really do not matter at all.

THE WIDOW'S CRUSE. By Hamilton Fyfe. Thomas Seltzer.

MR. FYFE has a long established reputation as a publicist and newspaper man of solid achievement. Until recently he has been connected with the Northcliffe papers and, among other things, his study of Mexico has been recognized as a book of importance. But with the publication of this story he becomes entitled to a higher rating, as a figure of no small magnitude among the novelists of the day. This book should rank him at least with Locke and Arnold Bennett, and one may venture to believe that it has authentically lasting quality; a minor star in the galaxy, if you like, but one that may well go on twinkling entertainingly a bit beyond its first day. It is something better than ephemeral fiction.

There is a manifest kinship to Locke, and to Locke at his best, but with a little more sedateness, and perhaps a more sardonic quality in his satiric analyses of humanity. Locke might have done the eccentric man of the story as well—and much as Mr. Fyfe does him—but he surely would not have handled the woman so unsparingly or to so entirely good an effect. Mr. Fyfe's creation of "Florence Poore" is nothing less than a masterpiece. It is not at all a pretty picture, but there is nothing malevolent or in any way exaggereated about her. She lives. Most readers will have met her and will recognize the essential truth of the picture, but she has not often been drawn with such precision.

Florence is the center of the theme. It is comedy, in a broad sense, with an underlying tragic note, and in the denouement it almost becomes farce comedy, ending in a grotesque situation that keeps its dignity by reason of its grim satire. Mr. Fyfe does not sneer at his people—in fact, he keeps them rather lovable in spite of themselves—but his laughter is mocking, sardonic and always illuminating.

Florence is an absolutely selfish, cold blooded, almost hen minded woman, but always human, capable of inspiring affection, very feminine, good looking enough to be desired, and highly efficient in having her own way. She is also sincere, in so far as such a person can be; she succeeds in actually deceiving herself into a belief in her importance. She is never a monstrosity, although she is, essentially, a comic absurdity—but always a reality.

Chance married her to an eccentric genius, Everard Poore, who is disillusioned as to her character even before marrying her, but who nevertheless manages to make the best of her. He is a minor journalist, leader writer, newspaper hack who has gained an assured but by no means brilliant position. He lives a double life, intellectually. He and Florence get on well enough, though she is disappointed with him, being ambitious socially and wanting a larger income. She regards him as a failure. There is no love or even real affection between them, but no break, no outward quarrel. His most intimate friend is Sir Lewis Dane, a popular novelist of somewhat anaemic mentality but a very decent sort. Dane is mildly interested in Florence, who finds him useful, as a sort of tame cat. Everard renews his boyhood friendship with a very different kind of woman, Lady Margaret, now a divorcee, a woman of fine intellectuality and artistic perception. There is no crude love affair between them, but to her he discloses his other side, and at her instigation he begins to write, to produce truly creative literature. But he publishes none of it. His attitude toward life is ironic—a general "not worth whileness," and an outward making the best of it. Then he goes off on an arctic expedition and is killed.

But he has left his four undivulged books in the care of Sir Lewis as literary executor. Sir Lewis recognizes them at once as beyond question works of genius, and also capable of great popularity. He persuades a highly commercial publisher (who, by the way, is a vividly and somewhat maliciously drawn

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